



Abel Tasman National Park

A walker's paradise

Abel Tasman National Park is renowned for its world-famous coastal walking track, its golden beaches, unmodified estuaries, sculptured granite cliffs and mild climate. It is a good place to visit at any time of year but during summer the park is particularly popular and the bays become dotted with sea kayaks, sailing boats and other water craft.

Many people choose to stay in huts or campsites provided by the Department of Conservation (DOC) as they explore the Coast Track. The track hugs the coast, offering spectacular views as you reach the top of a ridge, then it's back down to a sheltered swimming and picnic spot.



Getting there

Abel Tasman is located at the top of the South Island; the nearest towns are Motueka and Takaka. The Abel Tasman Coast Track is accessible by road at four points, each with a carpark:

- Marahau, the southern gateway is 67 km of sealed road from Nelson.
- Wainui is 21 km from Takaka. The last 2 km is unsealed.
- Totaranui is 32 km from Takaka. The last 13 km of road is unsealed.
- Awaroa estuary is 31 km from Takaka. The last 12 km of road is rough and unsealed.

Water taxis operate to a timetable from Marahau and Kaiteiteri, providing transport to the main beaches of Anchorage, Torrent Bay, Bark Bay, Onetahuti, Awaroa and Totaranui. People are advised to book ahead.

Natural highlights

Noticeable features are the golden sandy beaches, the fascinating rocky outcrops (mainly granite but with a scattering of limestone and marble), the estuaries, and the offshore islands. The vegetation cover varies and reflects a history of fires and land clearance, but the forests are regenerating well, especially in damp gullies where a rich variety of plants can be found. Black beech/tawhai dominates the drier ridges.

The more common forest birds, like tūi and bellbirds/korimako, can be seen along with pūkeko around the estuaries and wetlands. Oystercatchers/tōrea, shags/kōau and little blue penguins/kororā can be seen on the coast. The park's boundaries formally exclude the estuaries, foreshore and seabed but in 1993 the Tonga Island Marine Reserve was created along part of the Abel Tasman coast. All life in the marine reserve is protected. Native wildlife, natural, cultural and historic features are also protected within the park.

Culture and history

For at least 500 years Māori lived along the Abel Tasman coast, gathering food from the sea, estuaries and forests, and growing kūmara on suitable sites. Most occupation was seasonal but some sites in Awaroa estuary were permanent. The Ngati Tumatakokiri people were resident when, on 18 December 1642, the Dutch seafarer Abel Tasman anchored his two ships near Wainui in Mohua (Golden Bay). He lost four crew in a skirmish with the local people and sailed away without stepping on to the land.

Later on, around 1855, European settlers began to log the forests, build ships, quarry granite and to farm in the region. For a time there was prosperity but soon the easy timber was gone and gorse and bracken invaded the hills. Little now remains of their enterprises.





Cleopatras Pool
G. Holz



Observation Beach
A. Thompson

Did you know?

New Zealand fur seals/kekeno are found along the coast of the park, particularly on the more remote granite headlands and offshore islands, such as Tonga Island. Be aware that these special animals are vulnerable to disturbance, so respect their need for space and keep 20 m away.

Concern about the prospect of more logging along the coast prompted a campaign to have 15,000 hectares of crown land made into a national park.

A petition presented to the Government suggested Abel Tasman's name for the park and it was opened in 1942 – the 300th anniversary of his visit.

Things to do

Walking

The Abel Tasman Coast Track, which suits most ages and most levels of fitness, is 51 kilometres long and most people can walk it in 3–5 days with plenty of time to explore. It is accessible at several points.

Many summer holiday makers choose to walk only short sections of the track and may use boat services from Kaiteriteri and Marahau to return to their starting point.

To find out more about the Abel Tasman Coast Track bookings and fees that may apply, please visit the DOC website at www.doc.govt.nz.

The Inland Track through the hilly centre of the park is more difficult. For more information about this track, please visit the DOC website at www.doc.govt.nz.

Several short walks are also available around the road ends.

Sea kayaking and sailing

Sailing, boating and sea kayaking allows you to access some of the sheltered coves that the track bypasses. Tours and rentals can be arranged locally. Please note that boating below the high tide mark and outside Tonga Island Marine Reserve is controlled by the Tasman District Council.

Swimming and beach fun

Most visitors to Abel Tasman spend some time lazing on the beach and enjoying the water, especially in summer.

Facilities

Huts

There are eight huts in the park; four along the Coast Track and four inland. The Coast Track huts have bunks, tables, benches and heating. Ablution blocks have flush toilets and washbasins with cold water only. There are no cooking facilities or lighting.

Campsites

There are numerous campsites in the park and all of them have a water supply and toilets, although most water supplies are untreated.

For more information on hut and campsite booking systems and fees, please visit the DOC website at www.doc.govt.nz.

Totaranui campground

This is worth a special mention as it is a large campground divided into two parts: the smaller section, designed for Coast Track campers, has a one-night limit and runs in the same manner as other Coast Track huts and campsites; there is also a larger section for people staying for longer. This section is heavily booked during New Zealand's summer school holiday period. Totaranui has a camp office, potable water, flush toilets (including disabled access), cold showers, fireplaces and carparking. There is also an education centre accommodating 40. Campground booking forms can be downloaded from www.doc.govt.nz

Please note there is NO petrol for purchase at Totaranui, however, more extensive services and broader accommodation facilities are located in the region's towns.

A wide variety of accommodation and services, from backpackers to luxurious lodges, are also available within the private enclaves in the park.

Park safety

Visitors should take care to avoid dehydration, sunburn, boat accidents and minimise insect bites. Only walk across tidal estuaries within a few hours of low tide. While the Abel Tasman Coast is generally warm and dry in summer, remember it is a coastal environment which can change quickly so be prepared for rain, cold and windy conditions.

If you are going to be using the track system in the park for overnight trips make sure you are properly equipped and well prepared. Please check at one of the local i-Sites for up-to-date information on weather and track conditions. The DOC website has additional information.

For more information

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Bark Bay A. Dennis